

Social Studies

Step 1 - Read the text below

Step 2 - Complete the 4 charts related to the text

STUDENT READING: Before the White Man Came

BY CECELIA SVINTH CARPENTER

There was once a time before the white man came to the shores of southern Puget Sound. The Nisqually Indian people lived in their natural and undisturbed habitat. At that time, the Nisqually people called themselves *Squally-absch*. Grouping together in bands and villages, they lived in houses made from the cedar tree. They built their houses beside the freshwater outlets that flowed into and mixed with the saltwater of Puget Sound. Therein lay the home of the salmon, the mainstay of the Indian diet. Prairie lands bordered both sides of the lower reaches of the Nisqually River and extended far into the forested foothills of Tacobet, the mountain now known as Rainier. Tacobet dictated the climate that nourished the lands of the Nisqually River Basin, the homeland of the Nisqually Indian people.

In those days the Squally-absch depended on the warm, wet climate to nurture the foods of the earth. It ripened the camas on the prairies and the hazelnuts in the lowland meadows. Sunshine in the spring, summer, and fall helped the Squally-absch to dry the assorted foodstuffs they had gathered so they could store them for winter. Each year the Indian people followed the same pattern of gathering and hunting, followed by the winter months spent in giving thanks and addressing their spirit powers for the gifts provided for them, for there were no stores for making purchases.

The Squally-absch were alone in their effort to clothe, feed, and shelter their families. From their cedar homes—hewn from giant red cedar trees—and from their warm beds, the Squally-absch enjoyed the winter months. They made clothes out of cedar bark and deer furs gathered during the summer trek. The women wove their baskets from spruce roots and cedar bark and fashioned mats made from carefully prepared dried cattails. Catching salmon in the river and its tributaries was a never-ending job for the menfolk of the village. At almost any time of the year the Squally-absch would go out on the sandy beaches to gather clams, oysters, and geoducks and cook them over the hot rocks found in their cooking fires.

In a constant pursuit of food, the Squally-absch would concentrate first on the food found on the prairies. The vast expanses of prairie land would be burned off in the fall of the year so one could see far across the prairies in those days. During the camas bulb harvest, a steam pit would be dug with an ironwood stick sharpened to a point. The people steamed the camas bulbs for two or three days before drying them and storing them in baskets for winter use. Many of the food items from the meadows and lowlands consisted of roots and leaves of the brake fern, the wood fern, the dandelion, the wild sun-flower, and the tiger lily. Some of the roots were eaten raw while others were blanched in a basket of hot water warmed by hot rocks from the family cooking fire.

The foothills yielded berries of all kinds, such as the blackberry, the salmonberry, the elderberry, the salal berry and the blackcap. All of these berries, with the exception of the salmonberry, were placed on racks above a slow-burning fire before packing them away in storage baskets. The salmon berry and the thimble berry contained so much moisture that they would be eaten fresh or mixed with water for juice. Dried berries would be mixed on the grinding rock with animal fat or ground meat to make pemmican.

The Squally-absch hunted deer in the foothills or sometimes on the prairies and in the meadows. They also hunted by digging pits on animal paths. Sometimes a lasso was laid on the ground so that the animal would find itself yanked high in the air. Bows and arrows were also used for hunting the mountain goat, the bear, and the coyote. Every part of the animal was used. The hide was dried on a rack to be tanned and made into clothing items or used for the family bed. The meat was carefully cut into strips and roasted by the cooking fire. The bones were made into necessary tools. Small animals such as the beaver, the rabbit, or the squirrel were roasted for a quick meal. Small bits of their fur were used for decorations. Birds were caught by stringing nets between two trees where the pheasant and the grouse would become entangled and would make a tasty meal.

As members of a hunting party journeyed homeward they would watch for hazelnuts and acorns. The hazelnuts would be laid out in the sun and dried while the acorn had to be boiled to remove the acid taste. To keep the acorns for later use, they could be buried in the mud next to a stream.

There were five distinct runs of salmon that came into the Nisqually River and any one of the species could be caught at any one time almost all year around. They were caught in wooden weirs built across the river or in the more quiet tributaries that drained into the larger body of water. They were brought in by the basket, cleaned, and spread out in a fillet-style structure and roasted before the cooking fire. No winter dwelling would be without rows of salmon strung from the ceiling rafters where they would hang until the cook cut one down for the evening meal.

The Nisqually family was an extended family where grandparents, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, as well as children lived together in a winter home. There might be five cooking fires adorning the center of one building to accommodate the many households residing there. Each family had its own sleeping quarters on the sleeping benches built along the sides of the winter dwelling. This extended family ensured that the many families within its structure would have plenty of men to hunt and fish and plenty of women to gather camas bulbs and berries to keep food on the table. That is the way it was before the white men came to Nisqually Country.

Chart 1. The Nisqually people ate many different kinds of food. Use the article to fill in the chart. (Note: some information may not be in the text).

Plant Food	Where they collected the food	How they collected the food	What they did with the food
Camas bulbs			
Hazelnuts			
Roots and leaves of the brake fern, wood fern, dandelion, wild sunflower, and tiger lily			
Berries: blackberries, salmonberries, elderberries, salal berries, blackcap, and thimbleberry			
Acorns			

Chart 2. The Nisqually people ate many different kinds of food. Use the article to fill in the chart. (Note: some information may not be in the text).

Animal Food	Where they collected the food	How they collected the food	What they did with the food
Salmon			
Clams, oysters, geoducks			
Deer, mountain goat, bear, coyote			
Beaver, rabbit, squirrel			
Birds			

Chart 3. Life for the Nisqually people flowed with the seasons. Using the article, mark an **X** under what season they performed the activity. Some activities may be done in more than one season.

Activity	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Catch salmon				
Gather clams, oysters, and geoducks				
Dry food in the sun to store for winter				
Eat stored food				
Gathering and hunting				
Thank the spirit powers for what they have gathered and hunted				
Gathered cedar bark and deer fur for clothes				
Burn the prairie				
Eat the hanging salmon				
Dig up camas bulbs				
Eat the dried and stored camas				
The extended family lived together in one house				

Chart 4A. The Nisqually made necessities out of many different materials. Use the article to fill in the chart with the material used to make specific items. Some may be made from more than one material.

Item	Materials Used
Houses	
Clothes	
Baskets	
Mats	
Bedding	
Tools	
Decorations	

These are only some of the materials the Nisqually used and only some of the items they made. How else, besides the article, could you find out about Nisqually life?

Science